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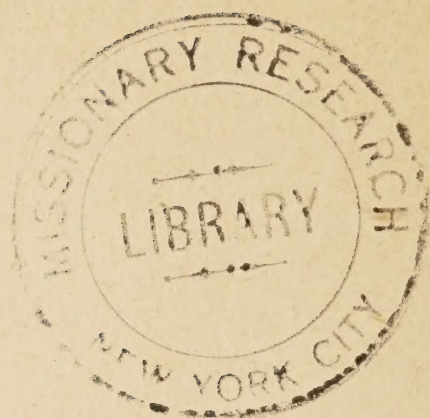
**SPIRITUAL**  
**SECURITY**  
**for TODAY'S**  
**FAMILIES**

**by Dr. Marion Cuthbert**

**3 You**  
**To Dr**

**Two by Sea**  
**Fail to Inva**  
**and of**

General Dept. of UNITED CHURCH WOMEN  
National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.  
156 Fifth Avenue, New York 10, N. Y.





# Spiritual Security for Today's Families



## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FAMILY IN HUMAN LIFE

It is impossible to give in words the fullness of meaning, the richness of experience belonging to the names of family members.

*Mother* — she held me first to her heart, and will always so hold me.

*Father* — he was always there, and so there was never want, never fear.

*Brother* — companion in childhood's endless golden hours of play.

*Wife, Husband* — the sweetness of becoming one with another.

*My Child* — God's glory, beginning so amazingly in one's own image again.

### **We study the family today.**

Today we study the family as a kind of subject. We are quite matter of fact about it, saying: in the family new life is received and cared for; there the child learns to accept the customs of living of the people round about him; there he learns to live with these others in satisfactory

ways. And, lately, a great deal is being emphasized about the home as the place where the child gets, or should get, emotional security — the feeling that he is wanted by others, and his own going out to others, in turn, in affection.

**What the family means to the child spiritually.**

But the family as the place where the child puts down his spiritual roots, and has them in his home — this is not so often stressed. Part of the reason for this is because some people have given over to the church, or to church and school, the whole business of developing the religious life of the child. Other people believe a great deal should be done at home, but they are either no longer quite clear about how to go about it; or, if they have ideas, the busy-ness of work and play seems to take all their available time and energy.

**The most important factor in child development.**

But it really makes little difference as to how adults explain to themselves their ideas about the way their children should be developed religiously. For actually what does happen is that children pattern their ways of thinking and behaving along religious lines after the fashion of the grown persons with whom they are most closely associated. And that means that even though family ties are in many instances not as close as once they were; and even though less time is spent in the home itself and in association with the members of the home group, nevertheless family relationships are still far and away the most important of all human relationships, and the family group-life remains the most significant of all one's social experiences.

**Family life necessary for survival and for learning how to be a human being.**

There is no need to point out in detail the importance of the home to the infant and the young child in reminding ourselves that family life, *however modified in form*, is absolutely necessary for the survival of human young. Even more significant is the fact that one has to *learn* to become a human being, and by far the greatest amount of instruction, and all the basically significant part, comes from the adults with whom the child is associated.

**Why Christian teaching?**

Christian people want their children to become Christian, not from pride in the religion

that has been so long, now, associated with the society of which they are a part; not merely because "a child must believe something" and Christianity is about as good as anything for a child to take hold of. No, Christian people want their children to become Christian because they are convinced that in Christianity is found *the way* of life for personal growth and happiness, and for the health and welfare of the nations.



## THROUGH MYSELF

The sincere person with such concern inevitably asks himself: what do I portray to others in this matter of Christian faith and belief? What example am I to the young in my household? What help am I to other adults whose skill in Christian living is increased, or decreased, according to the contribution I make to them? How am I to myself, when I face myself, fully, frankly?

### ***The nature of Christian living.***

The nature of Christian living is no mystery. It is concrete behavior that comes as the result of real and vivid ideas about what is the truth to be believed, and the kinds of behavior to go with such belief.

The Christian person puts Christ first, and his greatest concern is to try to live in the Christ-way. The way each person lives inwardly will be unique for that person, because each one of us is a unique personality. But the outward behavior has much in common. Some things the practicing Christian has found good over a long period of time.

### ***Characteristics of a Christian person.***

The Christian is a thought-full person. He turns to the immeasurable treasure of the Bible for ideas, for experiences to think upon. He thinks about his own experiences, also. What understanding is to be obtained from the events of his own life — what he did when he dealt with life as a religious person; how he fared when his skill in religious living was not good enough.



He calls frankly and openly upon God for help, sometimes praying in secret, sometimes asking the members of his family group to join him in placing before the Almighty both life's problems and its joys.

He seeks the company of those men and women who like himself want to walk "in the pilgrim way", and so he turns to the organized church for fellowship, for practical help in getting new skills and bettering old ones in the practice of Christian living, and for the place to worship God through praise and prayer. And he turns also, to the extent that time and opportunity allow, to groups outside the church that are frankly engaged in activities, one of kind or another, that seem useful in promoting the Christian way of life.

For grown persons who sincerely want the family of which they are a part to be a group that is literally trying to live out the Christ-way, there is no escape from full, sincere, desirous self-examination.



## **THROUGH THE ATMOSPHERE OF MY HOME**

All people in all times and places have used the arts to portray the things most important to them. Man gives form to his ideas, and so temples crown the hills; the grace of bodies is caught and held in marble; myriad colors he selects to give life-tones to scenes from heaven and earth. He discovered a wondrous relationship in sounds, and so pipes and strings bring harmonies in a train.

### **Visible evidences in the home.**

It is not strange, then, that in the home of the person deeply interested in spiritual living, there will be found in books, in music, in some inspiring figure or picture, testimony of what is of great importance to him. One will find a Bible, not as an ornament, but a loved book, often read and near at hand. And the children of the house will be found singing the great hymns of the church, alone, and for joy, because it was at a joy-time that such music filled all

hearts — the Sabbath Day, sitting proudly, like a real group-up, with father and mother at morning church; in Sunday School; at Christmas, that too — glorious day of childhood; and at Easter when everything is new; or in the picture of Jesus standing at the door and knocking, and the child who listened grows toward the man who heard.

But more than all testimony of things beautiful is the beauty of ways of being and acting together that provide the warmth in the Christian home.

Everyone there is wanted.

**Everyone wanted.**

Everyone is wanted because everyone has worth. This worth is not only that each one contributes in work, or sharing of abilities and gifts. In the old days when many family groups lived in country places the physical worth of each member of the family was a very real thing. There were tasks for all — from the little children right up to and including grandparents who most often lived with their married children; and for any uncles, aunts, or cousins included in a particular family group. Today many families are typically just parents and their children. But the most important difference today is that the family is no longer, in cities and city-like places, a united group of workers.

**Everyone of worth.**

It was always true that the profound worth of each member of a family came, not from his labor given, but from the fact that each human being is of infinite value to God. It is just easier to see this today when conditions of living make work contributions from every member of a family something not always possible to have.

But this is not to say that the contributions of each member of a spiritually-concerned family are not real and observable things. There is a great deal of listening to one another in such a family. This listening to parents is not because one must, they being all-powerful, but because parents have set the example of listening with full attention to what the children had to say. Of course busy mothers and fathers cannot give full attention to every bit of babbling and chatter, but all parents know the difference between that and the times when a child is trying to tell of something of the utmost importance to himself. When such listening is found at home,



a basis has been made for courtesy to others, in and out of the home.

**Everyone with grace in living.**

The gracious words of *thank you, please, if you don't mind, this is good of you*, come with no effort when there has been conscious, and much unconscious, attention to what each member of the family is like and what is happening to each one. For pleasant as our communications with one another are, they are often interruptions in some busy-ness of importance to the other persons, or demands upon them. Realizing this, the appreciate word comes with no effort. A good deal of casual courtesy is taught children by most parents, and this is all to the good, for it helps with ease in speech. But caring deeply for others come only with the point of view that each one is something of infinite value to God. We are careful with any precious thing. We find a good place for it, we turn to it again and again in admiration and pleasure.

**Everyone loved.**

But the question comes — do not members of a family sometimes behave in a way that makes it very difficult to think of them as precious things? Indeed they do. The child is naughty. The adult is angry, impatient. Minor and major laws of God and man can be broken. Is the rebellious one still precious, is the transgressor still of worth?

Here, as perhaps is no other place, does the profundity of the Christ-way of life show forth. The formal commandment: Forgive thy brother seventy times seven times, is just the doorway to one of the greatest truths about a human being — his capacity to realize that some particular way of behaving has been a poor business, to take his actions apart and see what was wrong with them, to pull himself forward into a new pattern of living, and go on from there. But this takes time, and it is in the interval when the person is struggling with his error that the love of the family group is so needed. For this re-birth from poor living into better living needs more motive powerful enough to make the individual go through the process. *Who cares what I am? Who cares what I do? I do. We do* is the thunderous answer back from those who love us, and when the tumult in the heart and head are quieted by such assurance, then is heard the still, small voice within, and that mighty, thundering whisper, *I do*, of God.



**Everyone free.**

The love between members of a Christian family is not a claim-chain upon one another. Even in a family group we are only *associated* with one another; we *belong* to God. So, Christian parents know they must help their children to a true independence of others, and a true dependence upon God. There will be no lessening of affection, no denial to the child of every bit of adult experience and knowledge that he might need; but it does mean from the earliest years giving the child complete respect as a distinct personality, helping him to independence in thought and action because he is made to see that he is a responsible individual, and that this responsibility must be checked by God and accounted for personally to Him.

**Things are talked over.**

In the Christian home all this is greatly helped by talking things over. Everyone has the need to communicate to others, but it is an art to do so. It is an art that must be developed from childhood years, when younger and older ones in the family discussed matters, listening fully to one another, asking one another to be imaginative about plans, about problems. The imagination of children is a wonderful thing. They are not yet weighted down by habitual thought and customs, and can put things together in fresh, often amazingly good, ways. But it takes the experience of adults to help make good selections from any assortment of ideas, and it particularly needs the experience of adults in choosing methods to go about the desired ends.

**The family circle is widened.**

One of the most interesting realities that is apparent to the Christian family is the fact that wanting one another, needing one another, that overflows the home. Dear friends are often involved in matters very important to a family group. But more than that, it is so clear to those who have practiced consideration and concern within the family group that the world is a very intertwined affair. The good life is not possible for a family group unless their community is a good place to live. That means that there is work enough, shared justly, so that all members of the community get a chance at supplying their physical needs. It means that the members of the community hold one another as being of worth, so that in the community, as in the family, if any person or any group should question — from real or imaginary despair — *Who cares?* the answer comes fully and quickly back from all the others: *We do.*

**Dealing with  
differences:  
Classes Nations  
Races Beliefs.**

The Christian family tries to understand why classes have appeared in human society, and why the value of any person is a thing so different from any place he may occupy in a community or in a nation.

They will see nations as inescapable groupings because of geographic location and historical events, but not as being any hard and fast classification of people. One loves his national group and is loyal to it, but one loves also his family group and its loyal to it, and is not prevented by this attachment from liking members of other families, and whole families, also. In the same way we like persons from other nations, and other national groups.

They will try to understand also why people have been troubled about skin color and why, in the light of a great deal of knowledge and a great deal of contact among all the peoples of the world, there has come the realization that color is interesting, but not significant, with regard to the worth of a person.

Perhaps the most difficult problem, in the matter of differences found among groups, are the differences in the ways of expressing religious beliefs. If, says the Christian, I am convinced that the Christ-way is *the way* of life for all people, is it not bowing before false gods to accept other ways of life? Even within the Christian faith, am I not hypocritical to seem to accept beliefs and practices that I know I do not truthfully accept?

Here is one of the matters for which family discussion will bear such good fruit. The younger members of the family group, in our mixed American society, will tell of friends. "I know Eileen, and she is one of the nicest girls in school. She's a Catholic and has such a beautiful rosary." "I know Sol Myers. He's Jewish, you know, and the best of the class in math." Or, "I know Sue Ling. She says Chinese people do not go to what we call church, but have a kind of religion right in their home."

Is it good? Is it all true?

The thoughtful adult members of the Christian family remind the others at once that all these contacts and friendships make one thing so clear: it is one thing to accept a person; it is quite a different matter to accept his religious beliefs. People have always been able



to make this distinction about others in the matters of tastes, choices of work and interests, political beliefs and philosophies. It is just so much harder to do with religious beliefs because one's religion is so important to a person.

Then other members of the family add, because they may have had unusual experiences or special studies, that it is surprising because not so well known, how well the great religions agree on fundamental matters. Do the others know what the Hindu religion says about family?

Even in the course of a hundred years:

A son cannot repay the trouble which his parents  
have undergone for the purpose of bringing him up.  
Let him do constantly what is good to his parents.

Is that not very much like the Jewish-Christian:  
Honor thy father and thy mother as the Lord  
thy God hath commanded thee

Or, the Christian says:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for, this is right.

While the Mohammedan says:

(Saith the Lord):

Be grateful to Me and to thy parents.

The teachings of Confucius have put it very well, indeed:

To set up love, it is for you to love your relations.

To set up respect, it is for you to respect your elders.

The commencement is in the family and the state.

The consummation is in all within the four seas.

(Quotations taken from: *Treasure-House of the Living Religions*, compiled and edited by Robert Ernest Hume, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1933).

Yes, say the younger members of the family, it is not so strange that religions agree on how to treat parents and one another. That could hardly be missed. But if you know that people you like do not believe in Jesus, what should you do?

The wisest member of the family has an answer for that: Believe in Him a little harder yourself by walking a little closer to Him. A

few are always converted by fair words, but legions have seen the great light in shining lives!



## THROUGH RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

***A way of living.*** For the Christian and the Christian family there is a deep conviction that concern for the spirit is most truly shown in a way of living. Day by day living.

Perhaps the conditions under which most people live now make it difficult to have the day begin with family prayers. The old leisurely ways have largely disappeared. There is distance, sometimes considerable, between home and the job, home and school. There is the bus to catch, or the car to take, or, if one walks, the need to set out in ample time. Besides, the gathering of the family group together for devotions, when it is to be something more than a rather meaningless ritual, is a real art, and that art is largely unknown now. But in almost all families some, if not all, members breakfast together, and a devout grace can be not only a reminder of our relationship to the Giver of all good things, but a benediction upon each person for the day. To go out blessed from one's home is to go out different — a little stronger in spirit, a little lighter in heart.

The saying of grace is good prayer-practice for children when they are helped not to mumble something before plunging into their food, but to say something thankful from the heart about gratitude for the gifts of food, and other needed gifts. Children should be encouraged to say many different graces — the old loved one as well as ones they make up themselves. And it helps when adults, especially parents, show their pleasure in these efforts. For the adults the saying of grace is a good time for an additional wise word, not forced, or over-long, but some brief, thoughtful addition that fits the needs of the day.

There are times when a family might well try for family worship. Some report that preparation for church services in such a time,



when, for a brief period before setting out, there is a quiet time with some simple word from father or mother about how helpful services can be for those whose minds and hearts are open to all that will be given, and a little prayer for help in having such hearts.

Some families still have one time, or several during the week for family worship, and some interesting modern versions of the old formal Scripture-reading-hymns- and prayers are found today. Some of these are: an evening of beautiful hymns; greatly loved religious music, sometimes by records, sometimes from special radio programs; the worshipful joining in with a religious service coming over the air; very informal choral readings of poetry concerned with spiritual values; the discussion of a play, a book, a picture, that has been thought-provoking along these lines.

***The great  
Christian holy  
days.***

Times that could be made most memorable for family worship are the Christian high holy days — Christmas and Easter. Nothing would be easier, if adult members of a family cared to do so, to make these occasions times for great home religious festivals. For little children are sure these are great and good days, and the younger members of the family would happily share their budding gifts of sociability and creativity in many field of activity by doing original, beautiful things for the occasion if they were asked to do so. Home worship must seem natural, good and simple to some convinced member of the family. Around such a member all the others would rally to do some beautiful thing — not some rather dreary ritual, not some forced listening to a tedious individual, but a genuine group activity when each person was convinced that he was doing an important and lovely thing for an important and beautiful time.

***Birthdays.***

Birthdays are another occasion for religious celebration. Our thoughtless society takes the great gift, life, pretty much for granted. Here is the time, and a graceful time, to remind children and for adults to remind one another, of the wonder of this great gift, of the unbreakable relationship of all with God. There is no need to overdo this at a birthday celebration, for our society does not make a religious matter of birthdays, but the simple word, some bit of brief, sincere religious ceremony, would make the occasion something more than it ordinarily is, something to be remembered differently.

**Weddings.**

Weddings have become so largely a matter of receptions and gifts that there, again, the need is to emphasize the great spiritual significance in what is taking place. When the ceremony is performed in a church this is a great help toward such emphasis. But from the intimate members of one's family the understanding, the words of prayer, the asking of God's blessing — all these give the union a quality of sacredness that nothing else could do.

**Death.**

Many people today try to avoid the subject of death, and banish from their premises all signs of such occurrence when a member of the family passes. Often death takes place in a hospital in which case it is easy to send the body directly to an undertaker's rooms. Even when death takes place at home the body is sent out at once and in many cases that is the last some members of the family ever see of the dead person. This is especially true of children, for it has become fairly customary to "protect" children from death and everything associated with it. When one remembers the orgies of wakes and mournings customary in this country not many years ago it is understandable how the swing could be so far away from such practices. But former behavior is now matched with gross disregard. This does not square with the Christian conception of death. Death and birth are seen as twin events in the great miracle of life, to be looked at fully, to be understood. Death is a natural thing, and none of the great natural happenings should be kept a mystery from a child. It is true that a child cannot understand this event as an adult would, but that is no reason for denying him knowledge of it and that kind of interpretation suitable for his years and his experience. Here is one of the ordinary events of life, fraught with meaning to the person trying to follow the Christ-way of life, and a golden opportunity to interpret to children the victory of the spirit over the body.

**Care for the lonely.**

It is incredible to a child that life could be so lonely, so desperate, that one might welcome death. But adults know how often that is so, as they come in contact with the lonely aged; with displaced persons; with those far from home. The planet is a very complicated affair, human life on it even more complicated, and every person will come sooner



or later on some aspect of this complexity with which he must deal. If a person has been among those fortunate one whose home was open to friend and stranger, alike; to those who had need for comforting friendliness and those who did not — then such a person has already had his heart opened to others who need the cheer of a happy family group, and he has learned much of the art of inviting such persons to his home, naturally, with no condescending, no overwhelming sentimentality. Many persons yearn to offer just such hospitality, but feel awkward about attempting it, having little or no experience in acquiring the gracious ease from practice begun in childhood.

**The difference  
one family  
can make.**

The difference that even one Christ-way practicing family makes in a community is out of all proportion to the size of the family, its economic position or any other measurable characteristic of it. This is easy to see in communities that are not too large in numbers, where it is not too difficult to trace social contacts. But it is true even in larger communities, and Confucius, in his great wisdom put it well:

From the loving example of one family a whole state may become loving; and from its courtesies, courteous.

(From *Hume*, again. All the quotations from Chapter 48, 'Home and family relations', pp 262 — 266).

Part of the Christian task is to make clear and vivid today the immense power for good in a person. It is among those who love him that the child is free to stretch his mind and try his hand at the thousand arts of living. It is for those loved better than self that we find time, when there is so little time; and for whom we work, on past all warning flags of weariness. It is in the sweet, worded and unworded, communion of family living that unbreakable bonds of love are made, and unwavering faith in God lighted into an unquenchable flame.

In the great truth of the Fatherhood of God, and therefore of the brotherhood of man, the idea of *family* shines forth. For we have chosen the most meaningful and the most deeply significant relationship known to man — the family — to show our relationship

to God. And so we speak of God the *father*, and of ourselves as *sons*. When one is greatly aware of his relationship to God, when one is an active doer of the Word, it follows inescapably that he is most concerned about that relationship upon earth that is the type and shadow of the spiritual actuality — the family and family life. The practice of the Christ-way is more, much more, than the practice of beautiful family living, but it begins in the family and stays everlastingly rooted there.

The spiritual security of the family grows and matures as the family lives together, meeting each situation as it comes with strength and courage and understanding. Then when crisis or tragedy strikes, a deeply-rooted confidence and fortitude born of an invincible faith in the love of God sustains and strengthens the family in its development of a spiritual adequacy for today.



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